

Beaker pottery in the Peñón de la Zorra (Alicante, Spain): Change and emergence of social complexity between the Neolithic and the Bronze Age

Miriam Alba Luzón, Gabriel García Atiénzar

Abstract

This paper analyses the Bell Beaker pottery record recovered at the Peñón de la Zorra site. This study focuses on a number of variables, ranging from the morphological characteristics to the stylistic variability of this pottery. The significance of this unique set of decorated vessels can only be fully understood by also looking at the archaeological and historical contexts in which it was found, so other deposits and the territorial organization patterns noted in the Alto Vinalopó (Alicante, Spain) are also considered here.

Introduction

Bell Beaker research in the Valencia region is quite a recent phenomenon. As a matter of fact, the first publication systematising all of the Bell Beaker sites in Valencia was written by Joan Bernabeu (1984), and today continues to be a key publication in this field of research. In this publication, Bernabeu put forward the idea that the Bell Beaker represented a 'hinge' period between the Chalcolithic and the Bronze Age, which he termed *Horizonte Campaniforme de Transición* (or HCT – Transitional Bell Beaker Horizon in Spanish). At the time, this idea was widely accepted by scholars working in this area of research, although even back then issues were raised in relation to Bernabeu's proposal. Therefore, the history of Bell Beaker research in the territory of Valencia has been characterised by a lack of agreement amongst scholars with regard to the terminology used to define its various pottery styles (Late Classic, Post-Maritime, etc.).

Over the past few years, the undertaking of excavations and further research on the Bell Beaker phenomenon in this region have led to an increase in the number of sites known from this period. The earliest references made to the Bell Beaker phenomenon in Valencia, as well as for most of the Iberian Peninsula, appeared in the 1928 study by A. del Castillo. Shortly after this came the discovery of the sites of Bèlgida (Jornet 1929) and Villa Filomena (Sos 1922; Esteve 1956; Soler Díaz 2013). Half a century later, the first thorough compendia on all known Bell Beaker sites in the Valencian region were published by Fletcher (1974) and Harrison (1974, 1977), each listing 25 and 18 sites, respectively. By the 1980s, a total of 48 Bell Beaker sites had been discovered (Bernabeu 1984). More than 30 years later, a new review work on the subject increased the total number to 83 (Juan-Cabanilles 2005). Therefore, nearly a century after the first discoveries were made, we have a good knowledge of the number and spread of Bell Beaker sites in this territory. However, understanding the historical process that took place in this area during the second

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Authors' addresses:

Miriam Alba Luzón
Instituto de Historia, Centro de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales (CCHS), Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC)
C/ Albasanz, 26 – 28, 28037 Madrid, España
miriam.alba@cchs.csic.es

Gabriel García Atiénzar
Área de Prehistoria, Instituto Universitario de Investigación en Arqueología y Patrimonio Histórico (INAPH)
Universidad de Alicante
Carretera San Vicente del Raspeig s/n
03690 San Vicente del Raspeig,
Alicante, España
g.garcia@ua.es

half of the third millennium BC continues to be slightly problematic given the lack of extensive archaeological excavations and absolute dates available for this period (García Atiénzar 2016 a).

Throughout the decades, the pottery record has been the one to receive the most attention, especially in terms of the description of its motifs and of the vessels. The purpose of these descriptions has always been to establish a chronological sequence for this period (Bernabeu 1984; Ruiz 1990; Juan-Cabanilles 2005). Based on these descriptions, and in terms of the wider European Bell Beaker phenomenon, it seems like the oldest style for this area¹ is the Maritime². For L. Salanova (2005:13) this style constitutes “a very particular vessel, the production rules for which are very strict and identical throughout Europe” (translated from the original in Spanish³). Its characteristics comprise a red brick-type colouring, a regular bell shape and simple decorations based on bands of horizontal lines filled with impressions of shells or combs (Bernabeu 1984; Juan-Cabanilles 2005). Following the discovery of all over-corded ware (AOC) and corded-zoned Maritime beakers (C/ZM) at Villa Filomena (Castellón), and the latter variation also at the site of La Vital in Valencia (Molina and Clop 2011), these characteristics also need to be added to the overall description of the Maritime style for this area.

As has also been observed in other parts of Europe, over time the techniques used benefited from variations, as did the decorations and even the shape of the vessels, giving rise to new stylistic variants. These, classified by Bernabeu (1984: 86) as ‘Compound’ and ‘Transitional’ styles, are found all throughout the Valencian region. Juan-Cabanilles (2005) redefined these variants, naming them ‘Epi-Maritime’ or ‘Dot-impressed Geometric’ to refer to those vessels with dot-impressed decorations that did not match the Maritime decorative standards. These vessels are morphologically and technologically very similar to the International series, although in some cases they have dark surfaces, a more common feature amongst the Later styles.

The stylistic evolution becomes more apparent from the Late Bell Beaker – Post-Maritime – period onwards, with the emergence of the so-called Late Styles. These varieties are termed differently according to the region in which they are found, the most significant in the Iberian Peninsula being the Ciempozuelos, Carmona, Salomó and Palmela styles (Garrido 2014). Within the Valencian region, the Late style is characterised, amongst other things, by complex compositions made using a range of techniques (Bernabeu 1984; Juan-Cabanilles 2005). The main motifs found on Late Bell Beaker pottery in the Valencian territory consist of bands with different types of reticulates, lines and zigzags mainly made through incisions, although other impression techniques have also been document, such as stamping or pseudoexcisions. This has led to the Valencian Bell Beaker style to be classified under the same category as the Incised style. Howev-

- 1 Although the datings of the Bell Beaker levels of Cova de les Cendres (Bernabeu and Molina 2009) pointed to the chronological preference for International styles, new dates obtained from La Vital (Pérez et al. 2011), Quintaret (García Puchol et al. 2016) and Peñón de la Zorra (García Atiénzar 2016 a; 2016 b) point to the contemporaneity of the various styles.
- 2 Most of the beakers documented in the Valencian region correspond to the Herringbone variety (Juan-Cabanilles 2005, 390)
- 3 Original text in Spanish: “un vaso muy particular, cuyas normas de fabricación son muy estrictas e idénticas de un lado a otro de Europa”

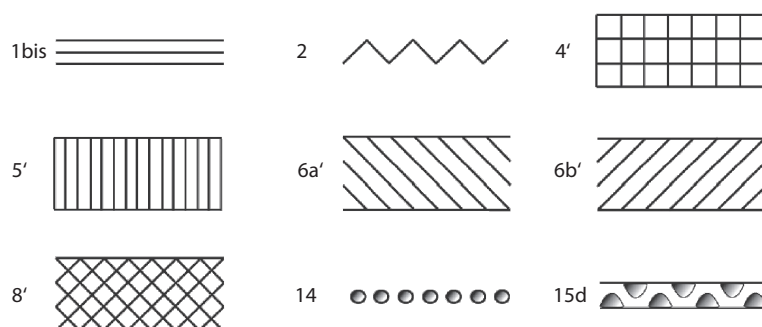


Fig. 1. Main motifs found on the Bell Beaker pottery in the Valencia region.

er, and as we have noted at different sites in the region (Alba 2016; Alba et al. 2017), the incision and impression techniques are nonetheless used to similar extents.

The way in which the motifs are arranged within the compositions is where the complexity of this supposed Valencian regional style becomes most apparent. It is also within these arrangements that this style's different decorative schemes can be best documented:

- The first decorative scheme resembles the Maritime style as it is based on alternating between decorated bands and non-decorated bands (Figure 2, 1.1 – 1.2).

- The second decorative scheme ends the band sequence with a series of triangles facing downwards on the bottom third of the containers (Figure 2, 2.1 – 2.2). These triangles are filled with simple lines running in any direction (vertically, horizontally or obliquely) or with reticulates. The compositions tend to comprise one or two separate horizontal bands and a final band with triangles. Bernabeu (1984: 92) described this as a 'Late Classic' scheme given its similarities with the Maritime style.

- The third, much more complex, is based on the consecutive layout of shifted bands. This group of compositions can be further divided into four sub-types:

1. The shifted layout of the motifs across the vessel's profile, separated – or not – by non-decorated bands, but not necessarily consistently; generally, the lower half of the container is left undecorated (Figure 2, 3.1 – 3.2);

2. A similar arrangement to the Late Classic with a sequence of triangles in the lower part, but with the motifs arranged continuously across the length of the vessel's profile (Figure 2, 4);

3. The same sequence of shifted motifs, but with vertical bands on the middle-lower portion of the vessels; the bands tend to merge with the base (Figure 2, 5);

4. A composition that combines the scheme that has a band of triangles in its lower third and that comprising vertical bands, presenting an alternation between bands and triangles around the vessel (Figure 2, 6.1 and 6.2).

- The fourth is a decorative scheme in which the triangles and zig-zags are the main components. These motifs remain undecorated, and it is the resulting non-decorated spaces that add ornamental value to the pieces (Figure 2, 7.1 and 7.2).

Although the decorations are mostly located on external surfaces, there are exceptions to this, such as the pottery bowls found at Vila-famés (Bernabeu 1984, 39). The formal typologies show a significant representation of typical Bell Beaker grave goods (S-shaped vessel, bowl and casserole), although we also have the exception of the poly-pod bowl in Beniprí (Figure 2, 7.1), a pottery shape completely unrelated to any of the pieces found in the traditional assemblage (Bernabeu 1984).

The surface treatments on the pottery mostly entailed polishing, which led to the darkening of their tones, ranging from orangey-brown to greyish-ochre (Ruiz 1990, 76; Juan-Cabanilles 2005, 394), although black pottery has also been found (Alba, 2016).

The analysis of this style is of particular relevance in the Alto Vinalopó region due to a number of reasons (Alba, 2016). On the one hand, the first decorated fragments, in addition to other typical

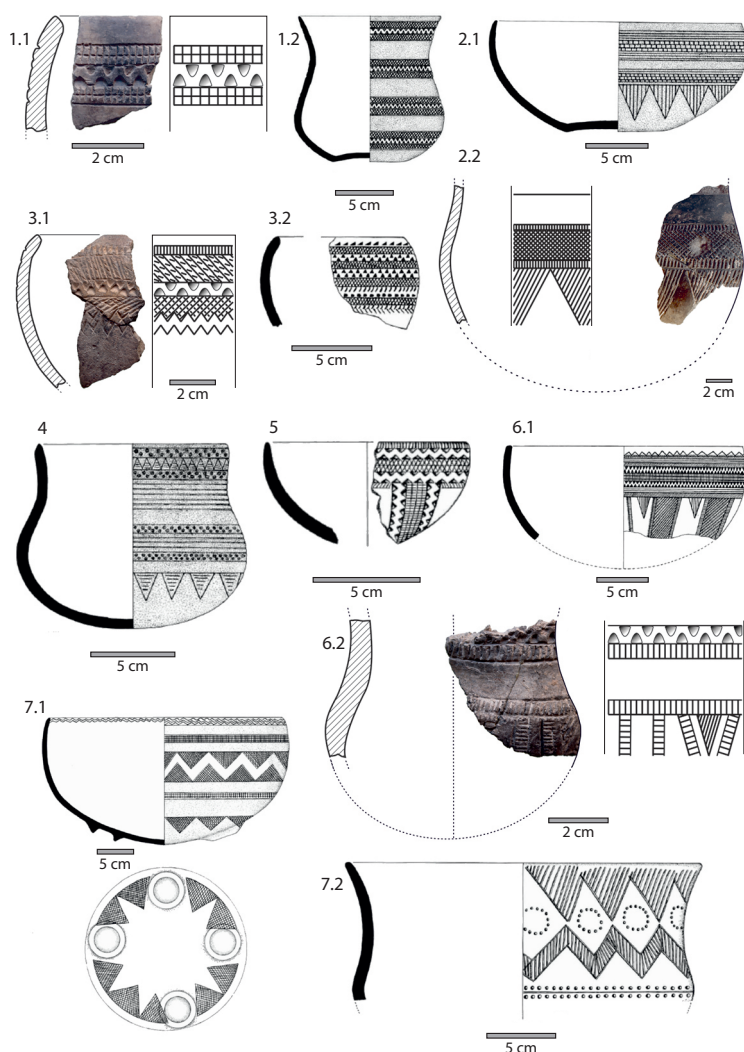


Fig.2. 1.1. Vessel 11 from Peñón de la Zorra; 1.2. S profile vessel from Cova dels Gats (Alzira, Valencia) (Bernabeu 1984, 45); 2.1. Example of the 'Late Classic' defined by Bernabeu from Cova dels Gats (Alzira, Valencia) (Bernabeu 1984, 46); 2.2. Casse-roles from Peñón de la Zorra (vessel 53) showing a Late Classic scheme as defined by Bernabeu; 3.1 Vessel 9 from Peñón de la Zorra; 3.2 Bowl from Cova Santa de Vallada (Vallada, Valencia) (modified from Bernabeu 1984, 69); 4. Bell Beaker from Promontori de l'Aigua Dolça i Salada de Elche (Alicante) (Bernabeu 1984, 80); 5. Bowl from the assemblage recovered at Cova Santa de Vallada (Vallada, Valencia) (modified from Bernabeu 1984, 69); 6.1. Bowl from Tabaia (Aspe, Alicante) (Bernabeu 1984, 69); 6.2. Vessel 54 from Peñón de la Zorra; 7.1. Polypod bowl from Beniprí (Bèlgida, Valencia) (Bernabeu 1984, 61); 7.2. Vessel from Cova de la Recambra (Gandía, Valencia) (Bernabeu 1984, 36).

Bell Beaker elements, were first described by J.M^a. Soler (1981) more than half a century ago. This means that the sites in the area can be used as reference points. On the other hand, this region has been researched extensively, resulting in a detailed knowledge of its archaeological sequence. Up until now, various sites with Bell Beaker evidence have been excavated, allowing the identification not only of archaeological material from this period, but also other of its facets, including the social and economic spheres of these communities.

The Villena Basin: The Bell Beaker Phenomenon

The Upper Vinalopó is a natural region of the Valencian Community (Spain) located on the non-coastal part of the north-eastern portion of the Alicante province. Its name has to do with its geographical location on the upper part of the Vinalopó River valley, the backbone and main hydrological resource in the area. The earliest human settlements in the area date to the Middle Palaeolithic, and there appears to have been a significant degree of population continuity from then onwards as attested by the large number of archaeological sites (Soler García 1989). From the beginning of the Holocene, this territory has been characterised by the presence of extensive salty lagoons that have acted as ecological reserves and a focal point for human populations.

Space and time: Bell Beaker evidence

Human presence in the area consolidated towards the end of the Neolithic when the emergence of settlements, that can be described as representing small villages, is first noted. A clear economic intensification process can be seen at these sites, including changes in settlement patterns, which suggest that this was the time when social inequality began to emerge, and social organization patterns changed as a result (López 2006; García Atiénzar 2016a). Amongst these sites, it is worth mentioning **Casa de Lara** (Soler García 1961; Fernández 1999) and **Casa Corona** (Fernández et al. 2016), large open-air settlements located on the perimeter of old salty lagoons and characterized by the presence of storage silos. Their occupation spans from the Mesolithic to the Bell Beaker period, and it is during the latter occupation phase when the presence of the first metal objects and beaker vessels are first noted.

The earliest hill-top settlements appear during the Bell Beaker period. The **Puntal de los Carniceros** is located on a plateau around 60 m above the bottom of the valley, from where there are excellent views of all of the surrounding valleys, especially that which connects the interior parts of the Iberian Peninsula with the Mediterranean coast. The site that has provided the most information, however, is **Peñón de la Zorra**, found on a triangular-shaped rocky wall 100 m above the bottom of the valley. A small village with a long occupation span and two associated burial caves were documented here.

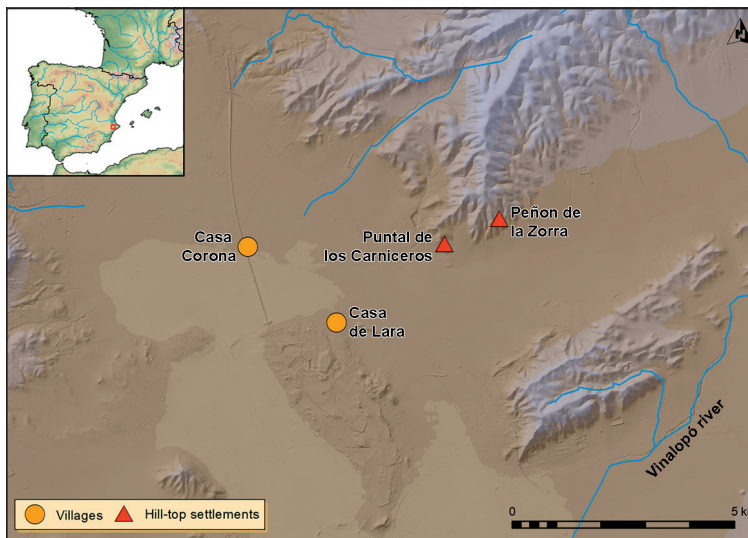


Fig.3. Bell Beaker sites found in Cubeta de Villena.

El Peñón de la Zorra: Life and death during the Bell Beaker period

José María Soler first excavated the site between the spring and summer of 1964. His excavations focused on the two burial caves, as well as the a small sounding in the settlement. Of the two burial caves, that which has yielded the most information is the **Oriental Cave**. It is located on the upper part of the hill, and below the settlement itself. According to Soler's published study of the cave (Soler 1981), the entrance was demarcated by a large arch made of rocks, which suggests that the cave may have been closed, and only opened when a burial was required. The human remains—six individuals: three adults and three infants—were found in association with various funerary grave goods (Soler 1981; Jover and de Miguel 2002). The presence of a number of metal objects is noteworthy

(Figure 4C), being the most significant a copper tongue dagger with a lenticular section, and a rectilinear hilt with a rectangular section (Simón 1998). These kinds of pieces are notably dispersed across Europe during the Bell Beaker period, although it is in the north Meseta where their closest parallels can be found. Their morphological characteristics enable us to place them during the final stages of the third millennium BC. A couple of Palmela-type points, 17 cm and 15 cm long respectively, were also found. These are made of metal in a similar way to the copper tongue dagger (Simón 1998). The last metal piece found in this cavity is a silver hoop, possibly a ring. The presence of this piece has triggered much debate given that the raw material used to produce it is not common for the Bell Beaker period and was more commonly used during the Bronze Age (Lull et al. 2014; Simón 1998). It is worth noting that the funerary grave goods comprised, amongst others, an assemblage of 14 fish vertebrae (shark), and these likely were part of a necklace used as a personal adornment. The grave goods also contained around 20 pottery fragments, none of which was decorated.

The radiocarbon analysis of two of the adult individuals and one of the infants dates their deaths in the Bronze Age, chronology that fits with the silver ring and some of the non-decorated ceramic fragments (García Atiénzar 2016a; 2017). Unfortunately, the remains of the other three individuals were very degraded, which made it impossible to date them. As a hypothesis, we suggest that the cave was first used for funerary purposes during the Bell Beaker period, during which time the metal weapons were deposited. At a later date, new burials took place, and these affected the preservation status of earlier interments.

The case of the **Western Cave** is similar. The analysis of the human remains has revealed the presence of at least two individuals, both radiocarbon dated to historical periods. This suggests that the cavity was used throughout different historical moments. This would have led to the partial emptying out of earlier burials, although some of the grave goods were left in place, amongst which it is worth noting the presence of a silver hoop that is likely to be from the Bronze Age (García Atiénzar 2016a; 2017).

Traditionally, the **Peñón de la Zorra site** has been interpreted as representing a hill-top fortified settlement. This is based on the presence of four wall lines demarcating a 5500 m² area (Figure 4A). Excavations carried out there between 2011 and 2015 have revealed the presence of a long occupation sequence at this settlement beginning in the Bell Beaker period and ending in the Bronze Age.

The Bell Beaker phase (Phase I) is defined by two constructions. The first—House 5—has a trapezoidal plant, is around 25 m² and is demarcated by medium-to-large stone walls. A small stone bench attached to one of the walls was found inside the house, as well as a floor made of large stone slabs and flattened earth, and a fireplace located at its centre (Figure 4B). The archaeological assemblage recovered comprised, amongst others, a minimum of 13 decorated vessels (Alba 2016). The remaining material assemblage comprised other small-to-medium-sized undecorated beakers, a bone spatula, a perforated *Cerastoderma* shell, several flint flakes, and some hammers and mills. Although the material culture was spread throughout the house, there was a cluster in the centre area of the room where the burning structure was identified. The characteristics of this particular assemblage, mostly comprising restored vessels⁴, have enabled us to define it as representing an accumulation of primary rubbish. It has been dated to 3900±40 BP (UE 1010; Beta-332584) from a wheat seed found on the floor surface. The architectural characteristics of this space show it could be a domestic area, although the exceptional

4 Although the fragmentation index is high, much of the vessels are restorable. It is, however, worth mentioning that much of the assemblage may have been affected not only by the collapse event that affected the room, but also by post-depositional processes of an erosive nature that are known to have taken place in the eastern area of this space.

nature of the decorated pottery assemblage and the architectural features of this phase could be suggesting that its use was beyond the strictly domestic. This construction was preserved following the collapse of the room's walls and ceilings. This second event, also dated using a seed, was placed at 3870 ± 30 BP (UE 1007; Beta-445745). The chronological closeness between both events (use and destruction) is more than significant, with a 95 % statistical confidence interval.

The second construction from this phase is a solid structure tending to circularity and built using large stone blocks erected on a tiered-block platform. Its shape, its disposition—as the articulation axis of the rest of the constructions—, the amount of collapse documented, and its supra-elevated position suggest it may have functioned as an observation point (Figure 4B). From this location the surrounding areas can be well monitored, especially the Beneixama valley, the main natural path connecting this region and the Meseta with the coast through the Albaida-Serpis corridor.

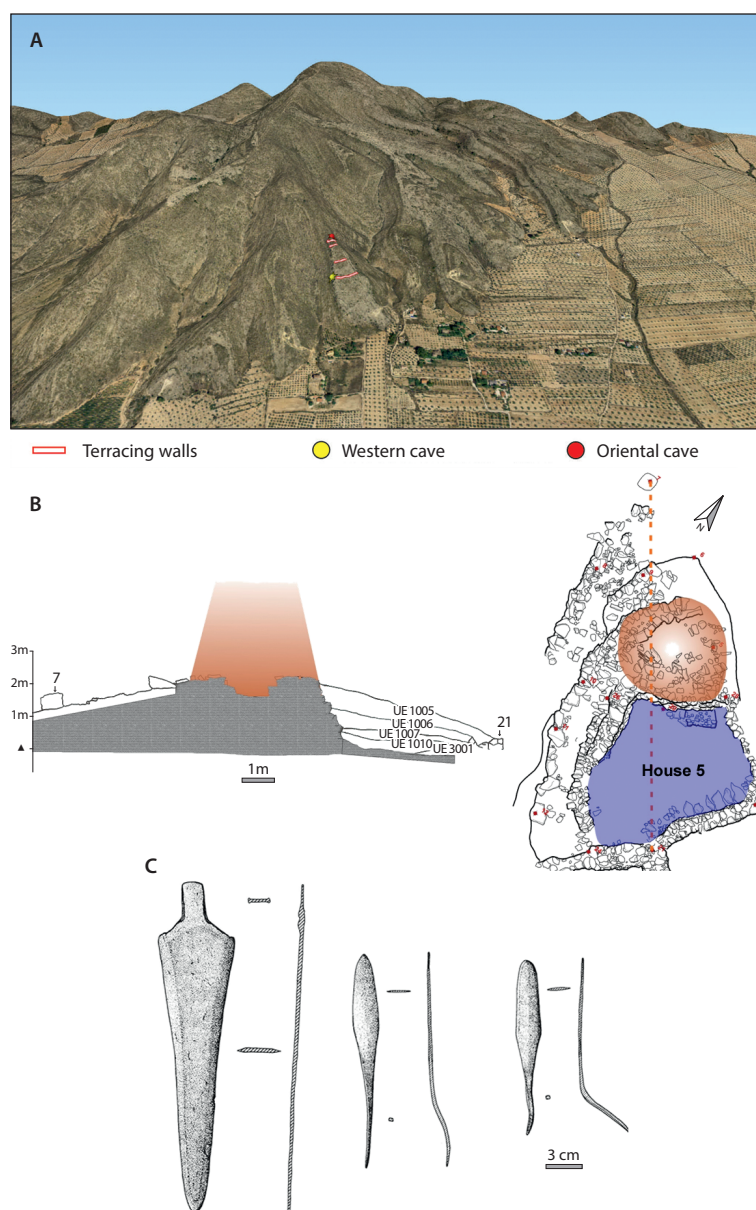


Fig.4. A: Location of Peñón de la Zorra and its associated burial caves; B: Floor and section plans of House 5 (UH5); C: Dagger and palmela points found at Peñón de la Zorra.

The Bell Beaker pottery from Peñón de la Zorra

The Bell Beaker pottery assemblage from Peñón de la Zorra comprises a total of 94 fragments. This large assemblage is unevenly distributed throughout the five houses that make up the site. To estimate the minimum number of Bell Beakers vessels (MNI), morphological (preservation of the edge) and decorative criteria (different decorative patterns) were used. This led to the estimation of a minimum number of 24 vessels. However, through the analysis of the decorative patterns a further 31 vessels could be differentiated, adding a further 24 to the assemblage up to a maximum of 55.

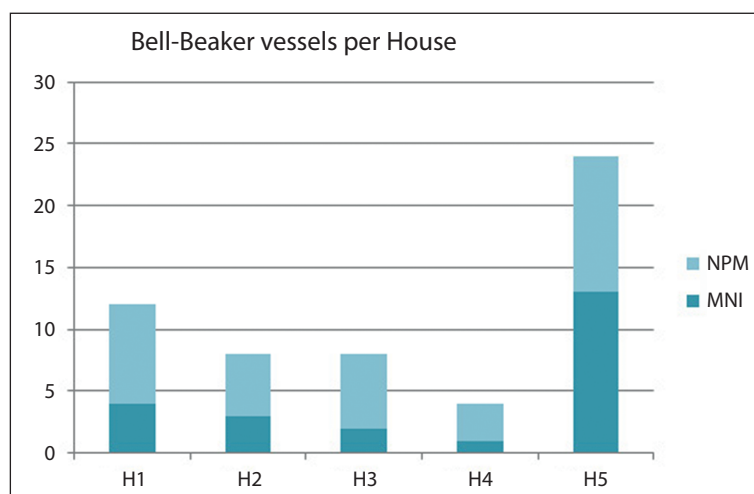


Fig.5. Minimum number of individuals (MNI) and possible maximum number (MPN) of Bell Beakers per house.

In House 5 we estimated an MNI of 13 vessels (47 fragments), more than half of all from the minimum estimate obtained for the whole site. The rest of the vessels/fragments were found in association with surface stratigraphic units or with the constructive levels from Phase II. The decorated pottery documented in these contexts appears along with other elements characteristic of the early moments of the Bronze Age. This mixture forces us to think about the reuse of Bell Beaker materials during the restructuring of the settlement, event dated around 2100 cal BC (García Atiénzar 2017).

a) The morphological analysis

The main issue with regard to this assemblage is its high degree of fragmentation, meaning that the formal assignment criterion is restricted to following three parameters:

1. The orientation of the edge;
2. The development of the profile;
3. The dimensions and curvature of the profile.

It was not possible to describe many of the fragments morphologically and/or typologically based on the above three criteria, so a large number of vessels were recorded as 'indeterminate'. Despite this, all morphological types known for the Peninsular Bell Beaker can be found within this assemblage: 3 Bell Beakers (vessels 1, 17 and 54); 11 casseroles (vessels 3, 5, 10, 15, 18, 20, 24, 33, 37, 52 and 53); 22 bowls (vessels 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 19, 21, 22, 23, 29, 36, 39, 40, 45, 46, 47 and 48); as well as 19 'indeterminates'.

Bell-Beakers morphologies in Peñón de la Zorra

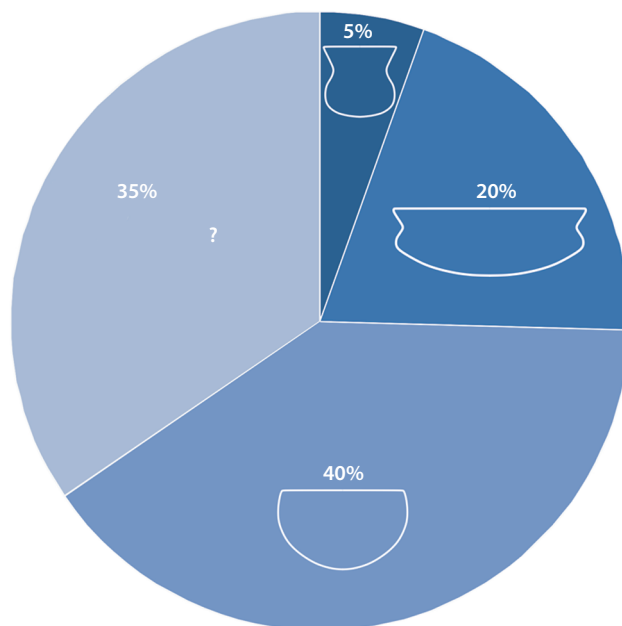


Fig. 6. Percentages of the different formal typologies recovered at Peñón de la Zorra.

b) Decorative techniques

The Bell Beaker assemblage from Peñón de la Zorra was made using typical techniques of the Late Bell Beaker pottery tradition, most precisely, the so-called Valencian Regional style. Incision and impression represent the predominant techniques used. Both kinds are used on the same vessel in 65 % of the cases. Incisions are found on 25.4 % of the vessels. The careful examination of the grooves indicates that the decorations were made using some kind of pointy tool. Impressions appear in 9.1 % of the pottery. Of the impressed techniques, the use of dots is noted, done using some kind of punch with a simple and blunt point. Pseudoexcisions – 9 vessels –, are carried out using a tool with a flat end which, when stamping and turning, gives rise to an excision-like impression. The finding of three pottery fragments with a decoration that appears to have been incised but the motifs of which were traced using the consecutive impression of a tool is interesting (vessels 8, 28 and 35; Figure 7). This same decorative technique was observed by L. Salanova (1992) and R. Garrido (1999) in the south of France and the Meseta area, respectively. As noted by Garrido, on these fragments the end traces of the impressions do not join up or supra-impose, showing that these *false incisions* were, in fact, produced through successive impressions.

To conclude, incision and impression techniques appear in similar frequencies in the Bell Beaker pottery assemblage at Peñón de la Zorra. Their use in the making of motifs is, on occasions, indistinct, as some are produced using both the incision and impression techniques (Motifs 1, 4, 5, 17). Therefore, and even though traditionally Late Bell Beaker pottery has been described as incised, we can see that this is not the case here, a fact that has also been documented in other areas of Valencia (Alba et al. 2017).

c) The decorative study

The decorative elements are always very simple given that these are based on geometric shapes: vertical, horizontal and oblique lines, zigzags, squares, rectangles, circles and semicircles. The motifs

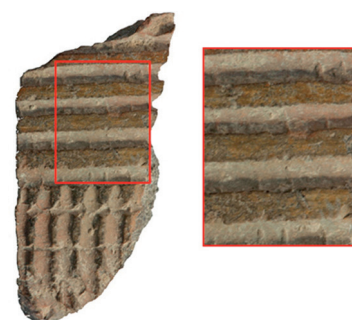


Fig. 7. Detail of the impressions marks from the production of Motif 1 (Vessel 8 from Peñón de la Zorra).

are obtained through moving and combining of one or various elements, forming horizontal and vertical bands covering the whole of the vessel's profile, giving rise to compositions in shifted stripes.

The most representative motifs are made up, from their greater to lesser presence, by simple lines (Motif 1, 1bis); grids (Motif 4, 4bis; 5, 5bis); semicircles (Motif 15, 15c and 15d); oblique lines (6b, 6b', 6a, 6a') and zigzags (Motif 2). The rest of the simple motifs are also frequent, although to a lesser extent (Motifs 8', 9a', 9b', 10a', 10b'; Motif 3; Motif 14, 14bis; and Motif 17).

There are also other more complex motifs, such as Motif 11, which comprises squares filled with vertical lines that alternate with flat spaces and act as a metope. Motif 12 is made up of vertical lines that do not stretch all the way to the horizontal lines that frame the band on one of the ends; the decoration is based on the alternation between these unfinished lines. Motif 13 would have comprised a sequence of double vertical lines framed by a double horizontal line on the upper part and a simple one in the lower part. Motif 16 would have been made up by elements that fall outside the basic geometrics category; their shape stems from the position of the tool when tracing the impression over the surface. In this way, when carrying out the impression to produce a semicircle, this would have produced a mark on the upper part, a triangular representation, giving rise to a new motif ⁵ (Figures 9–10).

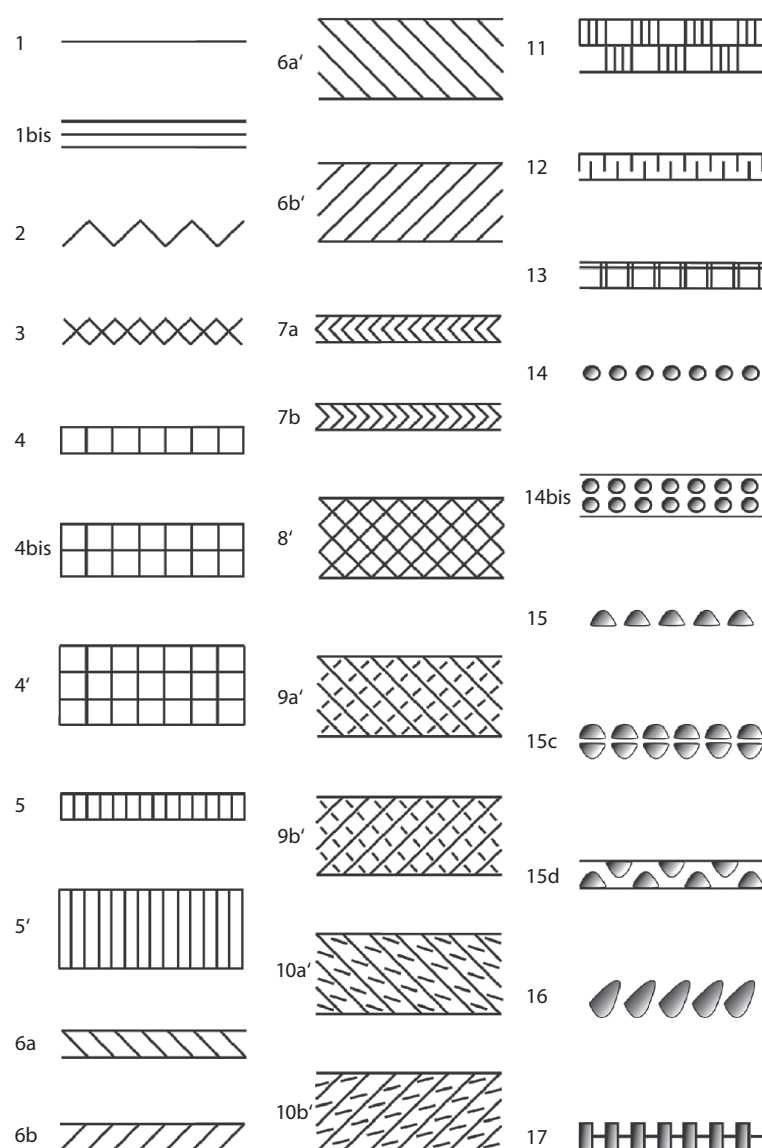


Fig.8. Groups of motifs from the decorated Bell Beaker assemblage from Peñón de la Zorra.

5 This motif only has been identified in the composition of a beaker. It could therefore be representing an anomaly derived from the elaboration of the decoration and not be a motif per se.

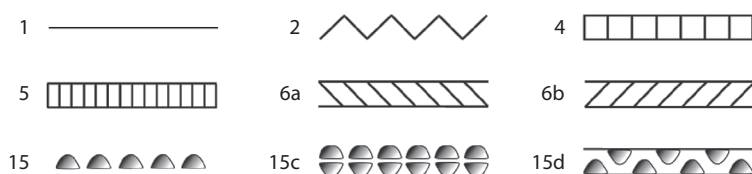
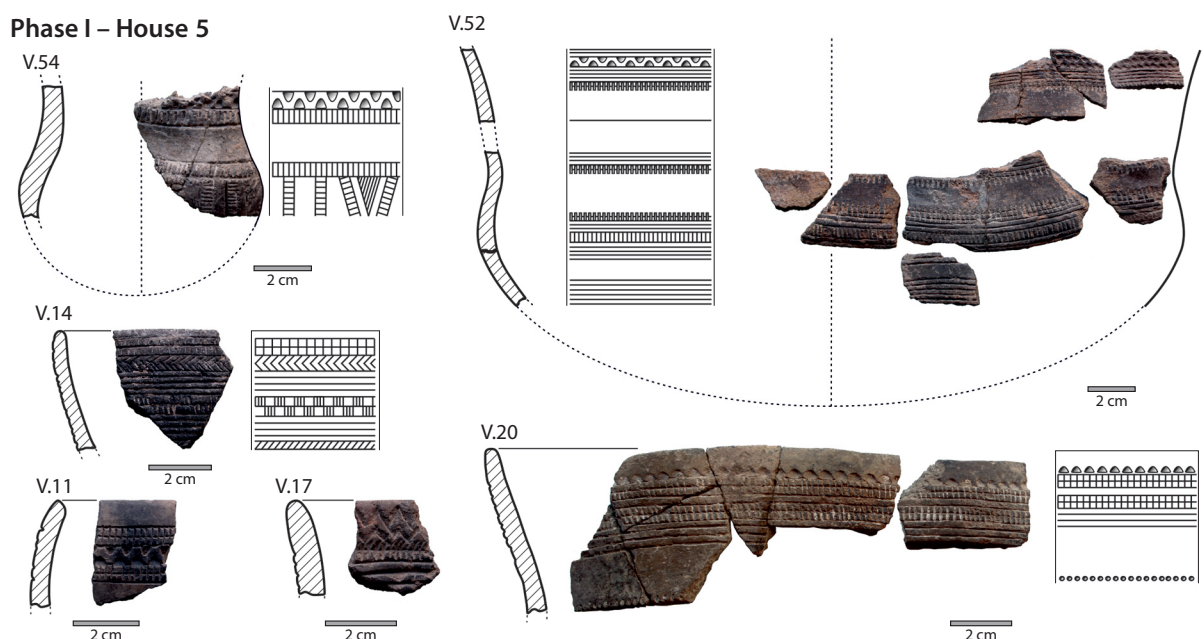
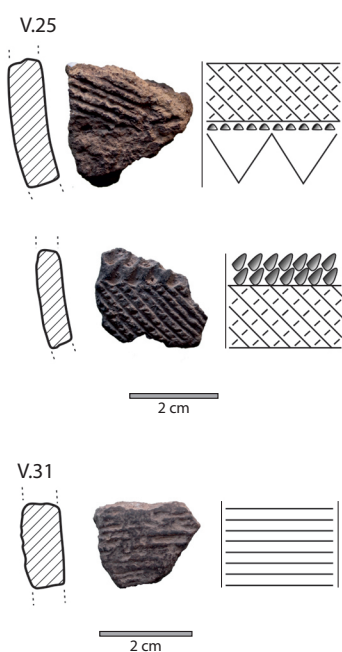


Fig. 9. The most represented motifs on the Bell Beaker pottery from Peñón de la Zorra.

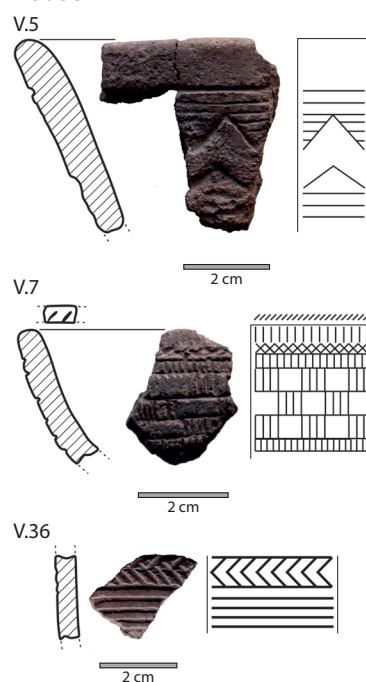
Fig. 10. Bell Beakers from Peñón de la Zorra.



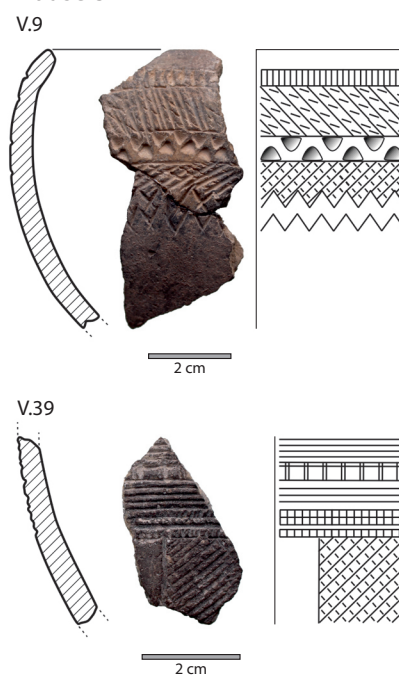
Phase II House 1



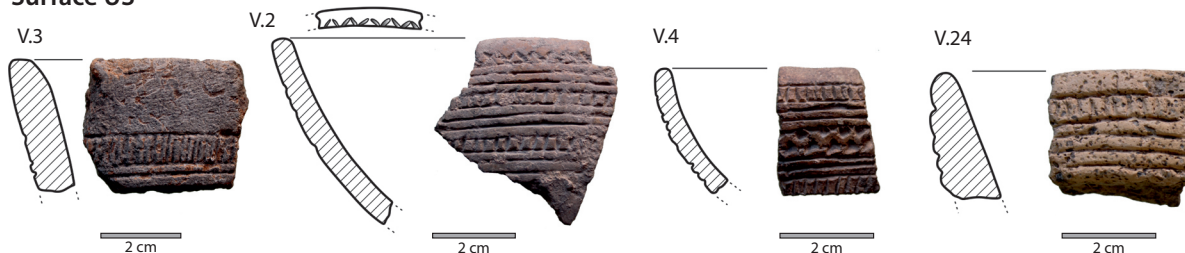
House 2



House 3



Surface US



The techniques listed above—incision and impression—can be seen on the most characteristic motifs in this assemblage, with the exception of Motif 15, which was carried out exclusively by means of pseudoexcision. In all cases, only the outer part of the vessels was decorated. Only three of the 24 vessels have decorations on the lip—one with Motif 2 (vessel 2) and two with Motif 3 (vessel 7 and 19). On the other hand, we also found pottery fragments with isolated motifs (Figure 11); the high degree of fragmentation noted in this assemblage, however, may have influenced the rate of preservation of such motifs. Of all these, it is worth noting that of vessel 46, where the beginning of a possible sun-shaped motif was noted (Figure 12A). This kind of symbolic decorations have also been observed in different areas of the Iberian Peninsula, especially in living spaces (Garrido and Muñoz 2000: 287–290), although most recently we have identified them in the nearby Cova del Conill, Cocentaina (Alba et al. 2017) (Figure 12B). These ‘symbolic’ motifs in the Bell Beaker period have always been thought to be linked to the ideologies and beliefs of these societies (Garrido and Muñoz 2000, 294). As Garrido and Muñoz have argued, we do not believe that the ideological contents of these representations can be fully interpreted, although they refer to the symbolic sphere, of which rock art manifestations represent its best expression (Barciela and Molina 2015).

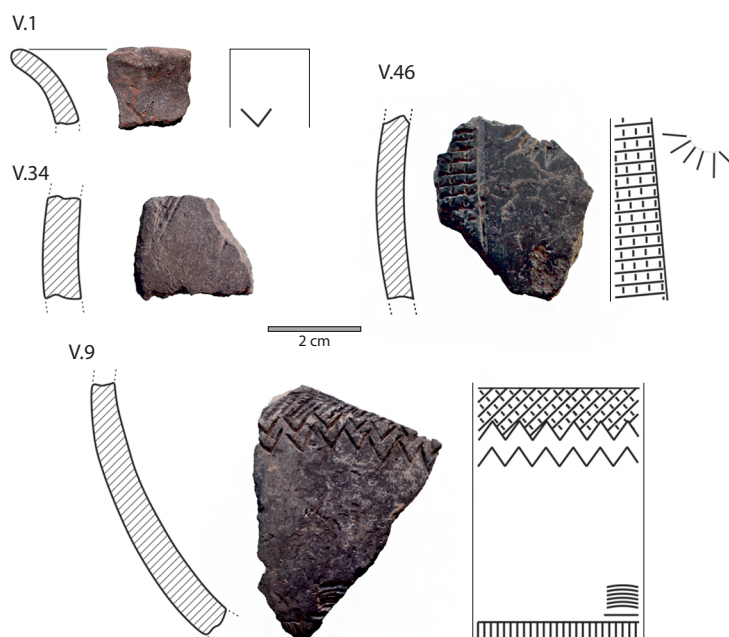


Fig.11. Vessels from Peñón de la Zorra with isolated motifs.

In terms of the decorative compositions, these are made up of horizontal lines known to be characteristic of the Bell Beaker period. The largest fragments enabled us to note the presence of motifs comprising vertical bands on the mid-lower portion of some of these vessels (vessels 8, 21, 22, 23, 54). In all cases, motifs arranged vertically are not a new occurrence, but rather would have been captured earlier on a horizontal band. These vertical bands would have become narrower towards the base giving rise to a cross-shaped or radial composition. This arrangement can be seen in vessel 22, the composition of which would have been radial in relation to the umbo, which would have been demarcated by a double point impressed decoration.

In general, the composition schemes do not tend to have more than four different motifs each, with the most common being three, and which tend to be arranged consecutively across the profile of

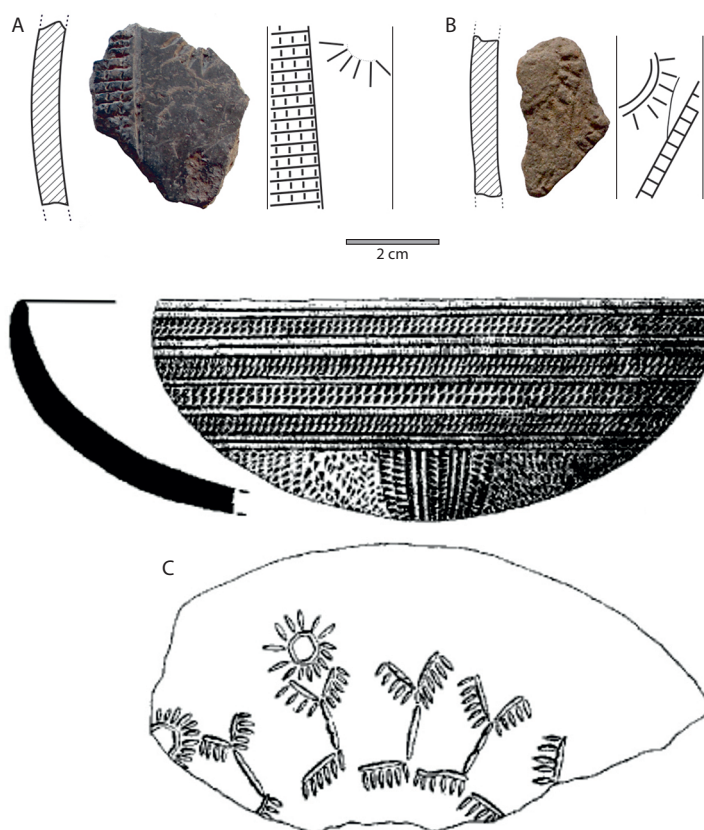
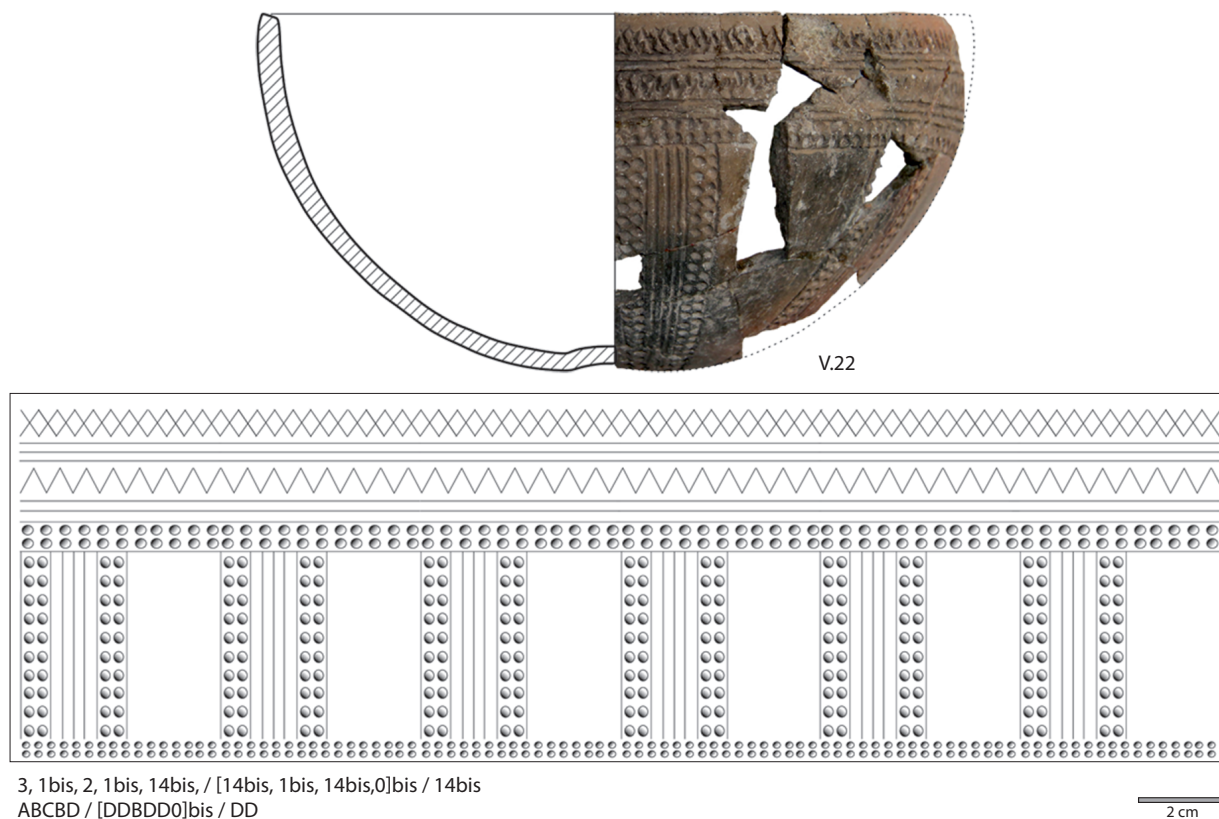


Fig. 12. A: Vessel 46 from Peñón de la Zorra with a possible sun-shaped motif; B: Vessel from Cova del Conill (Cocentaina, Alicante) with a possible sun-shaped motif (Alba et al. 2017, fig. 5, 5.9); C: Vessel with a 'symbolic' decoration from Las Carolinas, Madrid (Garrido and Muñoz 2000, 289 fig. 2).

the vessel in an adjoining-type arrangement. Unfortunately, and due to the high degree of fragmentation, we cannot make inferences regarding the order of the motifs on the compositions or the 'rhymes'. In the case of vessel 22, the order would have been ABCBD/(DDBDD0) bis/DD, given it comprises four motifs.

Fig. 13. Vessel 22 from Peñón de la Zorra.



2 cm

Lastly, the pastes on the decorated Bell Beaker pottery at Peñón de la Zorra tend to be blackish in colour, derived from firing in a reduced atmosphere, although the spectrum of colours is wide, ranging from blackish tones to ochre and orangey. The colour and treatment of the paste are similar to those observed in the Ciempozuelos style, as attested by the presence of some vessels with white incrustated paste in their motifs as a means of emphasising them, a typical Ciempozuelos technique.

Discussion

Traditionally, the presence of Bell Beaker pottery ensembles or kits tended to be associated exclusively with funerary contexts that, together with the rest of the grave goods – personal adornments, metal weapons, etc. – were exhibited to those taking part in the ritual as a way of expressing the social status of the deceased. Although no such context has been recorded in the Alto Vinalopó, in neighbouring valleys such as Albaida or Serpis, the presence of burials in pits accompanied by pottery and, on occasion, metallic grave goods has been noted (García Puchol et al. 2013). This would indicate the presence of individuals or lineages with the ability to put together this kind of paraphernalia as a way of demonstrating the status of the deceased (and that of his/her descendants) to the rest of the community.

However, this ritual interpretation of the Bell Beaker ware has sometimes been questioned given that it is sometimes found in living spaces. This discussion arises from the contemporaneous idea that ritual spaces – graves, monuments, etc. – and living spaces – more linked to the economic sphere – must be separated. Nevertheless, Bradley (2003; 2005) argued that this separation could not take place in prehistoric societies, as is the case in many modern pre-industrial groups. In this sense, some authors indicate that the presence of Bell Beaker pottery in living spaces only represents a small portion of the total (1 – 5 %), which would show that it was not destined to be used in daily activities (Garrido et al. 2011, 120). Rojo and others (2008) also highlights the technological characteristics – not very suited to domestic use – and morphologies – vessels with very specific uses, like communal drinking events; the presence of bases with umbo, a shape that could be linked to a new type of commensality – of the Bell Beaker vessels to defend the idea that there was a ritual use of this ware. In the case of Peñón de la Zorra, and most specifically that of House 5, the decorated pottery represents 32.8 %⁶ of the fragments found; these data therefore make us think that this space may have represented more than just a domestic space.

On the other hand, the stylistic regularities and variations of Bell Beakers, as well as the similarities shared with different areas in the Peninsula (Alba 2016), allow us to talk about the presence of a symbolic ‘language’. In this way, the vessels, besides what they were used for, could have acted as messengers of meanings, messages or information of a social, economic and ideological nature to be shared with specific social groups (Prieto 1999; Wiessner 1983; Wobst 1977). However, their meaning cannot be fully interpreted (Hegmon 1998).

Alongside the characteristics of the pottery itself, we must also consider the archaeological contexts in which it was found. Taking into account House 5 at Peñón de la Zorra, we should note the nature of its material record, as well as the special link to territorial control that has the settlement in this moment. On the other hand, the analysis of the material assemblage recovered from House 5 differs to that found in other rooms of the site during the Bronze Age, more

6 This percentage must be greater if we consider that many of the undecorated fragments show characteristics typical of Bell Beakers and, therefore, may have also been part of some of the identified vessels.

related to domestic contexts. These characteristics are not like those observed in other Bell Beaker sites in the region, especially the open-air kind in which the beakers vessels always appear associated with funerary contexts or fragmented in abandonment levels.

Some authors have noted the presence of non-funerary settlements with important concentrations of Bell Beaker pottery in the Meseta (Garrido et al. 2011; Garrido 2012–2013). These authors suggest that in the non-funerary tumuli of El Alto III (Soria) and El Morcuero (Avila), sites with an important visual control of their surroundings, there could have been a series of commemorative rituals in which the Bell Beakers were deposited complete (and gold jewellery, as in the case of El Alto III) in the foundational levels, whereas others were broken on purpose as the construction of the monuments took place. It is clear that the archaeological reality of House 5 at Peñón de la Zorra is different to that of these tumuli, but its interpretation as a space in which certain commemorative functions took place makes, in our opinion, sense. The exceptional characteristics of the pottery assemblage described here enable us to put forward the idea that it may have been used as ware in commensality rituals (Sherratt 1987; Rojo et al. 2006; Garrido et al. 2011). This rituality would have been linked to the economic, social and geopolitical function of this site during its first phase of occupation. In relation to this, we must highlight the chronological match between the last villages on the plain and the first hill-top settlements. The radiocarbon dates (García Atiénzar 2016a; 2017) indicate that the last villages on the plain (Casa Corona and, possibly, Casa de Lara) were still occupied when the first hill-top settlements (Peñón de la Zorra and Puntal de los Carniceros) took place. This duality enables us to suggest the existence of a territorial hierarchy and organisation centred around the higher altitude sites which, as we have seen, do not seem to be living areas in the strictest sense of the word. In addition, we think it is no coincidence that the most significant Bell Beaker metal grave goods in the region are found at Peñón de la Zorra. The combination of these factors must be linked to emergence of an elite that developed not only as a result of its control over the intensification of agricultural activity, but also through its control of the exchange networks. These networks had to go through Villena, turning this region into a true entry and exit point for all kinds of products, raw materials, people and ideas that circulated between the Meseta and the coast, and between Andalusia and the eastern coast of the Iberian Peninsula.

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